



**STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

## **VX: Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is VX?**

VX is highly poisonous nerve agent. It is an odorless and tasteless oily liquid that is amber in color and very slow to evaporate. After it is sprayed in the air, it will settle on the ground and exposed surfaces. VX is primarily a liquid exposure hazard, but if it is heated to very high temperatures, it can turn into small amounts of vapor (gas).

VX is not found naturally in the environment, it is a man-made chemical warfare agent.

### **What are the symptoms of VX exposure?**

A low or moderate dose of VX may cause some or all of the following symptoms. If exposed to VX gas the symptoms will appear within a few seconds and if exposed to VX liquid within a few minutes up to 18 hours:

- Runny nose
- Watery eyes
- Small, pinpoint pupils
- Eye pain
- Blurred vision
- Drooling and excessive sweating
- Cough
- Chest tightness
- Diarrhea
- Headache
- Nausea, vomiting, and/or abdominal pain

Exposure to a large dose of VX could cause:

- Loss of consciousness
- Convulsions
- Paralysis
- Respiratory failure possibly leading to death

Fatigue, irritability, nervousness, and memory defects may persist for as long as six weeks after recovery from a single exposure episode. VX breaks down slowly in the body and repeated exposures can have cumulative effects.

### **How are people exposed to VX?**

- If VX is released into the air, people can be exposed through skin contact, eye contact, or breathing in the VX mist.
- People can be exposed by eating food or drinking water contaminated by VX or getting contaminated water on their skin.
- VX can remain on clothing for about 30 minutes after contact with VX vapor, which can lead to exposure of other people.
- Because VX vapor is heavier than air, it will sink to low-lying areas and create a greater chance of exposure in valleys and at ground level.
- VX can last for days on objects that it has come in contact with. Under very cold conditions, VX can last for months.

### **How do you know if you were exposed?**

You were probably exposed to VX if you were present during a release of the chemical and experienced a runny nose, watery eyes and difficulty breathing.

### **What should you do if you were exposed to VX?**

Leave the area where VX was released and get to fresh air. If the release is outside, move away from the area to the highest ground available. If the release occurs inside, get out of the building. Remove all clothing, rapidly wash your entire body with soap and water, and get medical care as quickly as possible. Avoid touching other people or surfaces until you have been completely decontaminated. Rinse the eyes with plain water for 10 to 15 minutes if they are burning or if vision is blurred. If VX has been swallowed, do NOT induce vomiting or give fluids to drink.

### **How is VX treated?**

Treatment consists of removing VX from the body as soon as possible and providing supportive medical care in a hospital. Antidotes are available for VX. They are most useful if given as soon as possible after exposure.

### **Where is VX found and how is it used?**

- VX is not found naturally in the environment.
- The only known use for VX is as a chemical warfare agent.

### **Why is there concern about VX being used as a bio-terrorism agent?**

VX is the most powerful of all nerve agents. Because it is odorless and tasteless, it would be hard to detect exposure until people developed symptoms. In the past, nerve agents like VX have been used as weapons in wars. Several nations, including the United States, have VX in their arsenal.

### **Can pets and other animals become ill from exposure to VX?**

Yes. Pets and other animals are susceptible to VX. If you think your pet has been exposed, call a veterinarian right away.